

Binghamton City Hall
West Side of Collier St.,
between Court and Hawley Sts.
Binghamton
Broome County
New York

HABS No. NY-5568

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5568

BINGHAMTON CITY HALL

Location: West side of Collier Street, between Court and Hawley Streets, Binghamton, Broome County, New York.

Present Owner: City of Binghamton.

Present Occupant: Municipal Government Agencies.

Present Use: Municipal Government Offices (until 1972).

Statement of Significance: The Binghamton City Hall is a fine example of the Beaux Arts style in the United States at the turn of the century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The real estate upon which City Hall is situated was conveyed to the Village of Binghamton by John A. Collier and Elizabeth Ann Collier, husband and wife, by the deed dated November 26, 1850, and recorded in the Broome County Clerk's office in Book 35 of Deeds, page 477, on December 30, 1850. Binghamton was incorporated as a city on April 9, 1867, at which time this real estate became the property of the city of Binghamton, which has retained uninterrupted title to the property since then.
2. Date of erection: 1897-1898.
3. Architect: Raymond Francis Almira11(1869-1939), of the architectural firm of Ingle and Almira11, New York City, designed City Hall. After graduation from Cornell University in 1891, he studied architecture under Victor Laloux at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1892-1896). In 1896 he entered and won the design competition for the Binghamton City Hall. During the years prior to his return to France he built a national reputation as an architect. Among the numerous well-known buildings designed by him are Fordham and Gouverneur Hospitals, New York City; Sea View Hospital, Staten Island; the central building and Pacific, Prospect, Bushwick and Eastern Parkway branches of the Brooklyn Public Library; Kingston (New York) Public Library; St. Michael's Church, and the Church of the Nativity, Brooklyn; the Roman Catholic Churches at Glen Cove, Oyster Bay, and Sea Cliff, Long Island; Ravenswood, Long Island City; Episcopal Church,

Franklin, Pennsylvania; the Novitiate of the Little Sisters of the Poor, Queens; Long Island, Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Jamaica homes for the aged (Little Sisters of the Poor); agricultural school of the New York Catholic Protectory, Somers Center, New York; New Jersey State Reformatory, Rahway, New Jersey; farm colony, Randall's Island, New York City; Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank, New York City; Binghamton (New York) Savings Bank; municipal lodging house, New York City; Brooklyn Public Bath; mortuary chapel, Calvary cemetery, Long Island City; the Shotter residence, Savannah, Georgia; the Alexander residence, Elizabeth, New Jersey. For some years, Almirall was a member and secretary of the advisory commission in charge of erecting the Carnegie libraries.

4. Original plans and construction: The structure was built at an original cost of \$121,549. Rectangular in shape, the building contains city offices, council and court chambers, and meeting rooms.
 5. Alterations and additions: Exterior changes have been limited to the rear of the building. The major interior change has been the replacement of a turn-of-the-century elevator by a more modern one. The ornate metal grilles of the original elevator shaft have been retained.
- B. Historical Events: Since its construction over seventy years ago, the building has played an active role in the history of the city of Binghamton, and has housed some of the leading personalities and figures in recent Binghamton and New York State history.
- C. Sources of Information:
1. Old Views:
 - a. In the vaults of City Hall are the eight original competition drawings, showing the building exterior, a section, and floor plans, dated 1896. (Copies of the front elevation, a longitudinal section, and first floor plans accompany this report.) There are also in the vaults the seven sheets of the original working drawings, dated 1897, done by Ingle & Almirall for the builder, James Steward Company. (Copies of the first and third floor working drawings accompany this report.)

- b. In the Binghamton Public Library, early photographic views of Binghamton City Hall may be found in:

Binghamton. Binghamton, New York: Binghamton News Company (n. d.).

Binghamton and Vicinity. Binghamton, New York: C. S. Woolworth & Company, 1906.

2. Bibliography:

American Architect and Building News, Vol. 55, p. 47.
Feb. 6, 1897.

Architectural Record, February 1908.

Binghamton Commission on Architecture and Urban Design, The Binghamton Urban Renewal Agency, and Valley Development Foundation. Summary Report, Binghamton City Hall. Binghamton, New York, December 1970. Original architectural designs were located for this study by Robert Eronymous, Planning Director of the Binghamton Renewal Agency.

Irving, Walter V. "Hotel de Ville," Bulletin of the Broome County Historical Society, December 1963, No. 14.

Lawyer, William S., [ed.]. Binghamton, Its Settlement, Growth and Development, and the Factors in Its History 1800-1900, Binghamton, New York: Century Memorial Publishing Co., 1900.

National Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. 29, p. 321.

New York Times, May 19, 1939, p. 21.

Rogers and Manson. The Brickbuilder, January 1899, Vol. 8, p. 13. Photograph, Subtitled "Vestibule Ceiling (Guastavino System), City Hall, Binghamton, N. Y., Ingle & Almirall, Architects."

Seward, William, [ed.]. Binghamton & Broome County, New York: A History. New York, N. Y.: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1924.

Withey, Henry F., A. I. A., and Elsie Rathbun Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles, Calif.: New Age Publishing Co., 1956.

Stephen F. Dragos, Executive Director
Nathan Bell, Assistant Director
Valley Development Foundation
Binghamton, New York, Dec. 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Binghamton City Hall is the only example in the city of "Hotel de Ville" architecture, and admirably expresses the taste of the turn of the century.
2. Condition of fabric: The fabric is of native sandstone and brick and is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 128' (three-bay front) x 102'; four-and-a-half stories plus basement.
2. Foundations: Poured concrete, in excellent condition.
3. Wall construction: The front wall of the building is load-bearing masonry of brick with a native sandstone ashlar veneer at the corners. The side and rear walls are of similar construction. The two lower floors above the molded base and the corners of the structure are heavily rusticated. This rustication is horizontal only.
4. Chimneys: There are two fireplace chimneys of sandstone-faced brick, and one central heating chimney of brick.
5. Porches: The front entrances to the building are approached by six granite risers on a poured concrete footing.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The three entrances have scrolled keystone arches with double doors. The original wooden and glass side doors are ornamented with paterae and have carved astragals. The center doors have been replaced with aluminum and glass doors. Each of the lintels dividing the doorways from the lunettes above bear the inscription: "MUNICIPAL BUILDING."
 - b. Windows: The building contains four basic forms of windows: casement (French windows), double hung sash, round-headed, and oculus. The casement and round-headed windows are used together in combination with engaged half- and quarter-columns which are a variant of the Ionic order. The arches of the round-headed windows have scroll keystones and molded

frames. The spandrels are filled with carved leaf-forms. The lintels between the round-headed and casement windows are of sandstone. Two of the oculus windows are in the mansard roof of the main facade, and have carved stone frames based on rectangular stone sills. A third oculus also occurs in the center of the mansard roof above the facade; it has an ornate sandstone scroll-and-leaf carved frame, topped by an eagle and scallop shell. The double-hung windows are used in various combinations on the front and sides of the building.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The building has a mansard roof with slate covering and copper flashing; there is a built-up felt roofing on the flat portion.
- b. Cornices, eaves: The full sandstone entablature (with cornice supported by flat modillions) is visually supported by four large scrolled vertical consoles of Baroque form. The entablature frieze above the three central bays of the front facade has the carved inscription: "FIAT JVSTITIA RVAT COELVM." Above the cornice of this facade is a low railing supported by square balusters and parapet blocks. The central parapet block supports the decorative central oculus and bears the carved inscription "MVNICIPAL-BVILDING."
- c. Cupola: The crowning, central, open lantern-cupola has four engaged columns--again a decorative variant of the Ionic order. The lower portion of the column shafts are ornamented with foliate swags in high relief. Balconettes of segmental plan project from the four cardinal faces; their wrought-iron railings are supported by the column plinths. The four tall openings are round-arched. Above the full entablature with salient corners a roof of squared domical form with chamfered corners supports a large finial which echoes the form of the lantern itself.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: [Photocopies of three sheets of the architect's competition drawings (perspective, first floor plan, longitudinal section) and of working drawings (first and third floor plans) are included in this report of the Historic American Buildings Survey.] Behind the three-bay central main entry

on the east facade is a two-story rectangular vestibule with a monumental two-stage T-shaped staircase. To the rear of this area, and below the first landing of the staircase, is a longitudinal corridor which gives access to a subsidiary staircase and the elevator. Flanking this central circulation core are two lateral ranges of offices that are one bay wide. To the rear of these offices are two rear ells that are one-story in height (on exposed basements because of the sloping site). Original plans called for a service court between these rear wings; however, a later two-story on raised-basement addition now fills in this area. Other floors follow this general configuration, with the council chambers over the entry vestibule, and longitudinal corridors on each level providing access to the lateral ranges of offices to the north and south. The main staircase above the second floor is in a semi-octagonal bay which projects from the rear of the structure. This bay is on the central axis of the building.

2. Stairways: The T-shaped granite stairway in the entry vestibule has an initial single, fifteen-riser flight which leads to a rectangular landing (approximately 14' x 8'). This flight is flanked by two square plinths at the fourth-riser level that are decorated with inscribed panels with egg-and-dart moldings, surrounds, scrolls and swags. These plinths serve as bases for elaborate metallic lighting fixtures that have round molded bases, columnar shafts supporting large single glass globes which are surrounded by six smaller glass globes on cornucopia arms. Broad, heavy sandstone railings are supported by carved, pierced raking parapets above closed strings. The two flanking enclosed flights which lead from the landing to the second floor are also of granite; however, the only decorative elements are sandstone dadoes to which are attached round metal handrails. The main staircase above the second level is housed in the semi-octagonal rear projecting bay that also houses the elevator. Thus the stairway between the second and third floors is comprised of three runs and two landings that enclose the central elevator shaft. The original elevator was an open-cage type with ornate metal grilles. These grilles are still in place.
3. Walls and ceiling finish: Each of the sandstone-faced walls of the entry vestibule are divided into three bays that are articulated by pilasters on marble plinths. The arcuated bays of the east (entry) and west (main staircase) walls are each approximately thirteen feet wide. These bays are separated by paired Doric pilasters over which are modified Doric entablature blocks

with rosette-ornamented metopes and egg-and-dart moldings. From these entablature blocks spring the molded ribbing of the Guastavino tile ceiling. The molded arches of these bays are heavily decorated with cartouches, scrolls, swags, and shells. The side (north and south) walls are each separated into three bays which are articulated by single Doric pilasters which are surmounted by a continuous modified Doric entablature. In the large single lunettes over these entablatures--and on axis with the pilasters below--are carved stone cartouches. These semi-elliptical lunettes are filled with Guastavino tiles. Below the entablatures are large scrolled keystones with high relief swags. Above the interior doors of this vestibule are transoms with cast-bronze ornamented grilles of rinceau and wreath pattern.

The two-story council chamber (approximately 40' x 26') is situated over the entry vestibule. Its plaster walls, which are divided into three bays each, are articulated by fluted composite pilasters above a continuous paneled wainscot. The wall surfaces between the pilasters have a variety of pilaster relief decoration: wreaths, swags, molded panels. Above a narrow continuous entablature are paired consols which visually support a modillion cornice. The narrow double wooden doors are paneled, and have molded wooden architraves over which are ornate rectangular cast-metal grilles and denticulated triangular pediments. On the south and north walls are small fireplaces with tile hearths and wooden mantels. The council chamber also has a gallery on the west wall. Access to this area is from the fourth floor.

4. Flooring: The entry vestibule has a mosaic tile floor; the hexagonal units are placed in a diagonal pattern. Other floor surfaces throughout the building are either painted concrete or vinyl tile.
5. Doorways and doors: Both the paneled doors and door frames throughout the building are of oak.
6. Heating: The building was originally steam heated; it now has hot water heat.

John Poppeliers
Senior Editor
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
January 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a 1963 cooperative photo-data project between the Broome County (New York) Historical Society and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Fifteen structures were recorded-- twelve in Broome County, two in Tioga County, and one in Delaware County. (This selection of buildings for our national archives of historic architecture subsequently served as the basis of the landmark list of the Binghamton Commission on Architecture and Urban Design, which was created in 1964.) Dr. Clement G. Bowers, Chairman of the Broome County Planning Board, prepared the initial historical reports; Prof. Eugene D. Montillon, formerly a member of the architectural faculty of Cornell University, and also with the Broome County Planning Board, assisted with the architectural descriptions. Additional historical and architectural information was contributed by the Binghamton Commission on Architecture and Urban Design under the direction first of Victoria E. Levene, and then Stephen F. Dragos. The detailed photographic record was supplied by Jack E. Boucher of the National Park Service. The project was under the general supervision of Senior Editor John Poppeliers, of the Historic American Buildings Survey.